

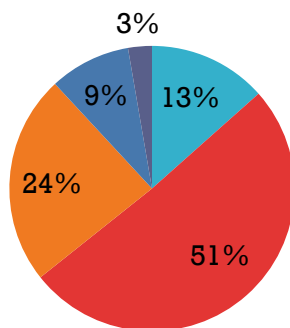


# Messaging and Public Opinion on Immigration Reform

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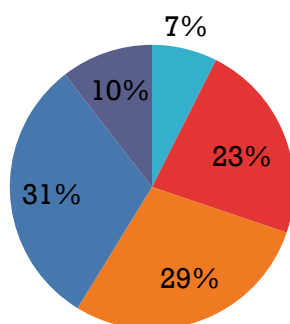
## Seriousness of the illegal immigration issue, by geographic frame of reference

### ■ In the United States?



- most serious problem
- very serious
- somewhat serious
- not very serious
- not at all serious

### ■ In your city or community?



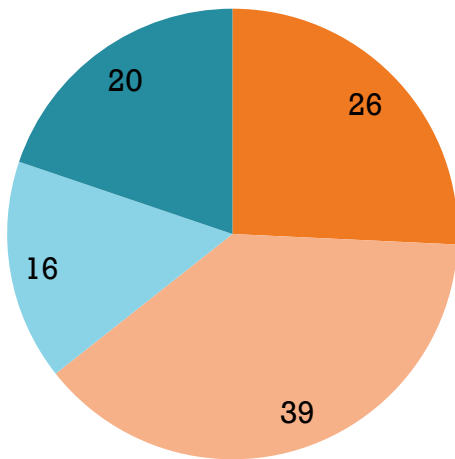
- We started off the survey by asking respondents to rank the seriousness of the issue of illegal immigration. Respondents were first asked to rate the seriousness of the issue with respect to the United States, and then in relation to their city or community.

- The results indicate that Americans are much more likely to see illegal immigration as a serious problem when thinking about the entire United States as the frame of reference, rather than more local contexts such as cities and communities.

- This suggests that attempts to get people to focus on their particular neighborhoods and cities will reduce the salience of illegal immigration as a public policy problem, while framing it as a national issue and not a local one will increase the salience of the issue.

- We tested for differences by by partisanship, region, gender. We find no significant gender gaps between the national and local picture. However, our results indicate that framing the issue as local versus national should have a stronger effect on Republicans, and among those living in the West and the South.

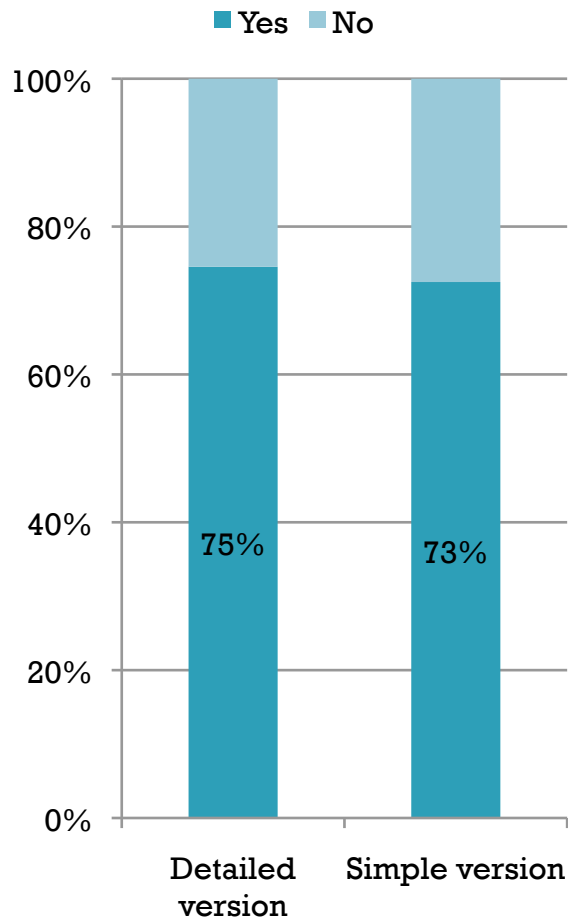
# Cutting the Backlog on Family Reunification



■ Strongly support    ■ Somewhat support  
■ Somewhat oppose    ■ Strongly oppose

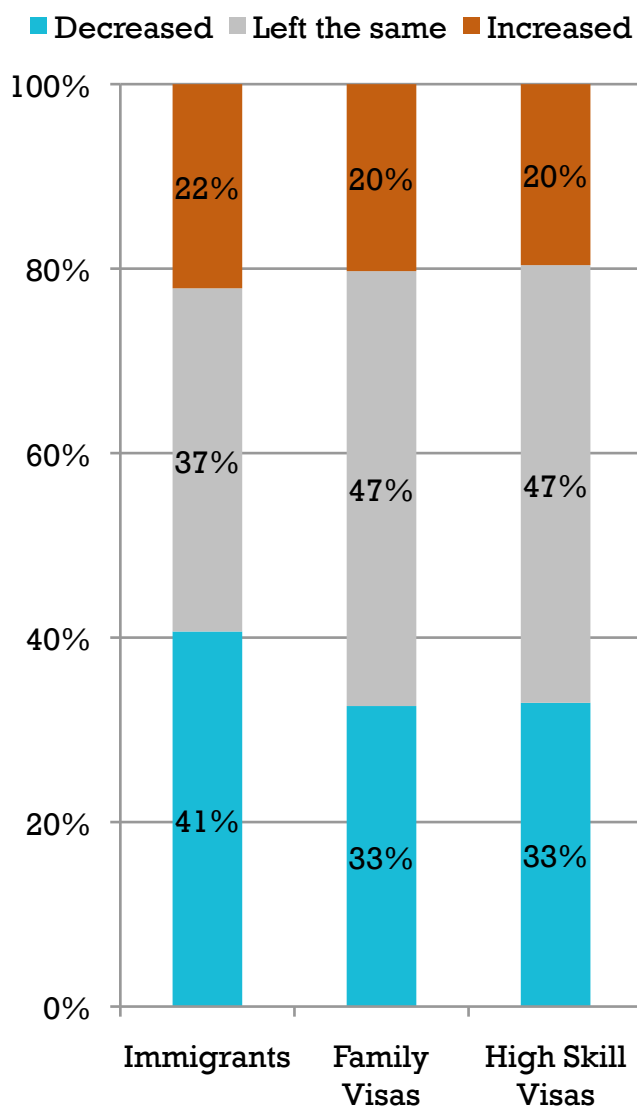
- In order to ascertain public opinion on reforming the immigration system to address the problem of backlogs, we asked the following:
- “Under the current immigration backlog, legal immigrants often have to wait for 5 years before being able to reunite with their spouses or children. There is a proposal in Congress to increase the number of visas for family members of immigrants who are in the country legally. Do you support this proposal? And are you somewhat, or strongly for/against this proposal?”
- The results indicate that American citizens are overwhelmingly in favor of cutting down on the backlog when it involves family reunification. 65 percent would support such a proposal, with about one if four citizens strongly supporting such measures.
- Support for clearing the backlog on family reunification was strong across all groups—men as well as women, Democrats as well as Republicans, and among voters in the Northeast, Midwest, the South, and the West.

# Support for the Dream Act



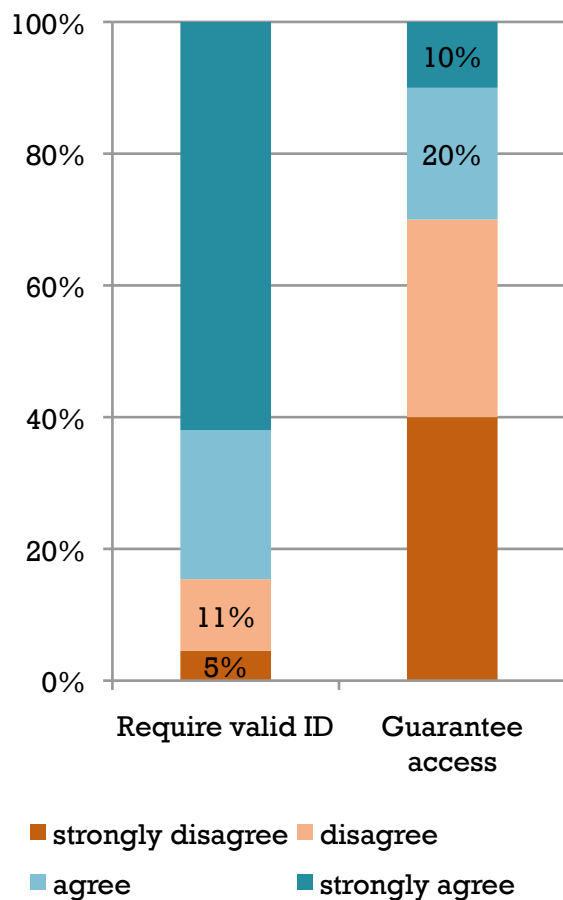
- An overwhelming majority of American citizens support the Dream Act (75%). Support is strong across all regions of the United States, and even among Republicans, 63% support the measure.
- There are two ways in which we attempted to gauge Americans' support for the "Dream Act" at the federal level. One version of the question was a simpler description of who would benefit from the Act ("those who were brought to the U.S. years ago as illegal immigrant children would be able to earn legal status if they graduated from a U.S. high school, have stayed out of trouble, and have enrolled in college or the military") while the other mentioned the fact that potential beneficiaries would first qualify for a 6-year visa, and would later qualify for citizenship only if they served in college or the military.
- Our results indicate that providing more details about the Dream Act had only a marginal effect on the level of support for the measure.
- However, providing more details increased support by about 5 percentage points (although within the margin of error) among men and among Republicans.

# Mentioning the word “visa”



- The most commonly-asked question about immigration policy in the United States has been whether people would like to see an increase, decrease, or no change in the number of immigrants allowed to come to the United States legally. In general, a majority of the American public has either favored a decrease in immigration or a maintenance of the status quo.
- We see a similar dynamic in our survey of American citizens in the fall of 2008. However, we also find that the mere mention of the word “visa”—regardless of whether it relates to family-based visas or high-skilled visas—leads to a significant decrease in restrictionist preferences.
- This pattern holds true for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans, and across most regions of the United States (with the exception of the South). The effects are also much weaker for men than for women.

# Legal status and access to government services

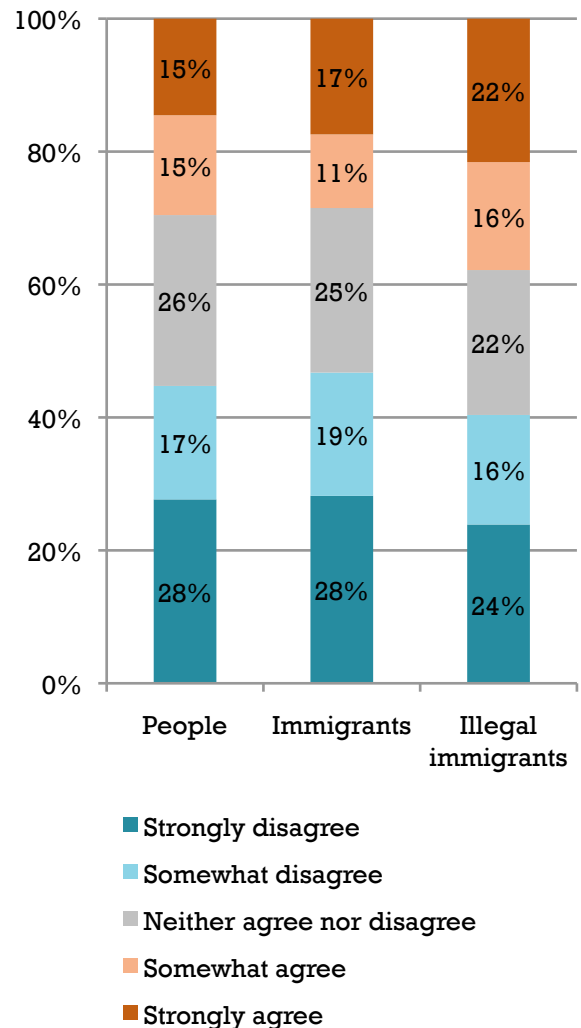


- Another frame that may affect Americans' support for immigrant access to public benefits is the extent to which it is portrayed as part of system "guaranteed to all residents" or one that "requires valid legal status."
- We asked whether people agreed or disagreed with the notion that local governments should: a) require immigrants to verify their legal status, or b) guarantee access to all residents, regardless of their immigrant or legal status.
- We found that the language of guaranteeing access to all residents does lead to greater support for immigrant access to public benefits.
- The framing effects were significant among registered voters in all regions of the United States, but were much stronger among women than men, and among Democrats than Independents or Republicans.

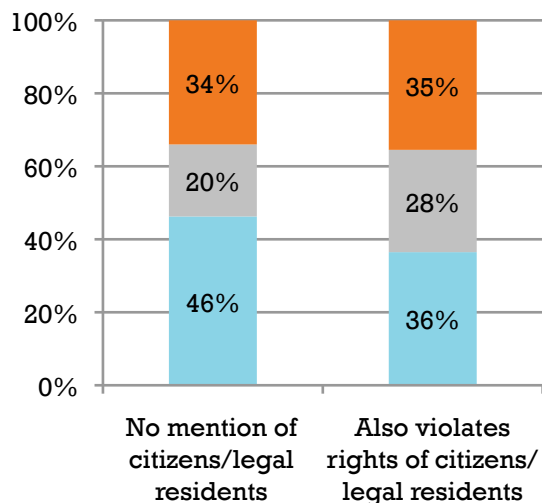
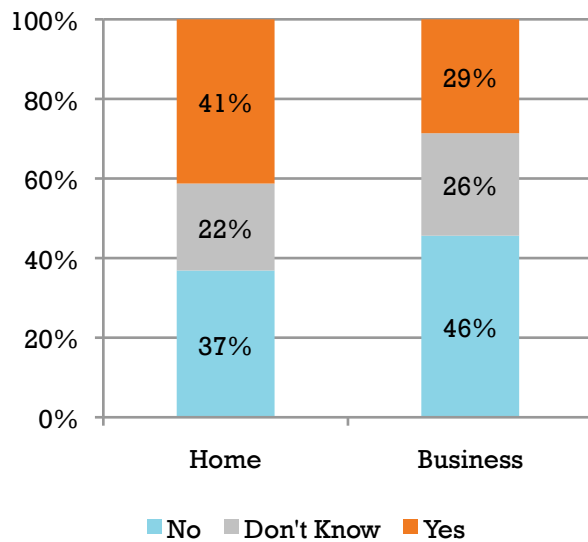
# Immigrant Rights on Deportation

- In recent years, the United States government has curtailed the ability of residents to have full and meaningful access to legal counsel while contesting deportation orders. For instance, in January 2009, the outgoing U.S. Attorney General Michael Mukasey issued a written opinion stating that persons in deportation proceedings do not have a constitutional right to counsel.
- Some immigrant advocates have argued that public opinion is more supportive of the curtailing of immigrant rights when the subjects are framed as “others,” using terms such as “illegal immigrant” or even “immigrant.” By contrast, it is assumed, referring to “people” may prompt Americans to be more supportive of the rights of immigrant residents.
- We asked whether it is all right for the government to ignore the ability of immigrants to have full access to lawyers when the government is trying to deport them.
- We find no significant difference between the frame of “people” versus “immigrant.” However, regardless of the frame used, only a minority of Americans agree with the decision to curtail access to lawyers for those contesting deportation. Indeed, even in the case of “illegal immigrants,” only 40 percent of respondents agree with a policy of denying the right to meaningful counsel.

- Concern about the legal rights of immigrants fighting deportation was similar among women and men, and was highest among Democrats and those living in the Northeast and in the Western region of the United States.



# Suspending Raids

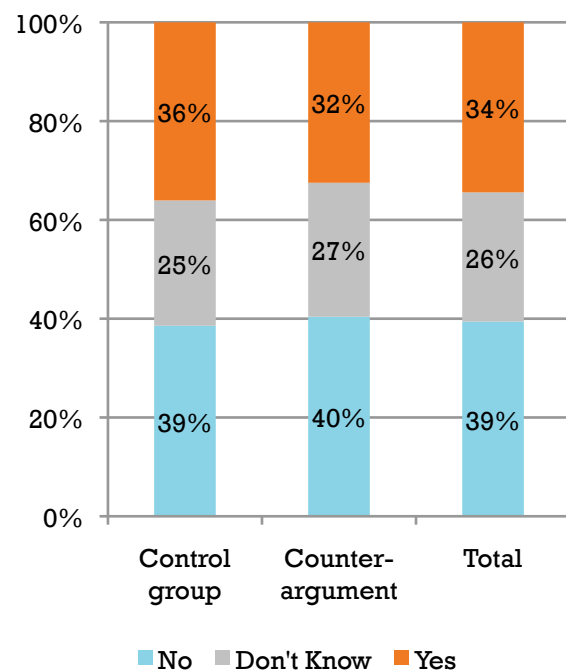


- Since 2005, the federal government has stepped up immigration raids on homes and businesses. In some instances, the rights of citizens and legal residents were also violated.
- We sought to probe the extent to which American citizens support a suspension of the raids, according to the location of the raid, and the extent to which the rights of legal residents were affected.
- As Figure 1 indicates, Americans are much more likely to favor a suspension of federal raids of immigrants' homes (41%) than the places where they work (29%).
- As we can see in Figure 2, mentioning the rights of legal residents and citizens being violated also makes a difference in terms of making Americans more ambivalent about the raids (28% say they "don't know," as opposed to 20% in the control condition).
- The framing effects are significant for all groups considered, with the following exceptions: the home vs. work distinction was not significant among Republicans and those living in the West, and mentioning the rights of legal residents made no difference for Republican voters.
- Finally, among those who have made up their minds on the issue, a majority of Democrats and those living in the West are in favor of suspending the raids.



# Suspending E-Verify

- E-verify is a voluntary program of the federal government which seeks to help employers certify that their employees are legally authorized to work in the United States. Since June 2008, most federal contractors are required to participate in E-verify, and the program has received some criticism from employers and immigrant advocates for their cost and errors in classification.
- In our survey, we first informed respondents about E-verify: “In the past two years, the federal government has begun implementation of a system called E-verify, which would electronically check whether someone is eligible to work in the United States.”
- We then presented a critique of the system, and in 50% of the cases, a counter-critique as follows: “Some people argue that the system has too many errors, and that innocent people are often denied work. <Others argue that electronic verification is an important tool in combating illegal immigration, even if it the system has some errors.>”
- We then asked: “Do you think that the federal government should suspend the use of E-verify until the error rate in the system is reduced to an acceptable level?”
- We find that Americans are generally opposed to suspending the use of E-verify (39% overall), although one in four remain ambivalent on the issue. The results also indicate that presenting a counter-argument leads to only a modest reduction in the proportion of Americans who favor suspending E-verify.
- Uncertainty about the issue is greatest among women, Independents, and those living in the Northeast. Among those who have made up their minds on the issue, Democrats, women, and those living in the West favor suspending E-verify.



# “Working families” and “people like us”

- Health insurance and access to health care are important issues facing the country. Immigrants are among those with the lowest levels of insurance coverage. We wanted to see whether American citizens would be more likely to extend health benefits to immigrant children if the benefits were framed as those “available to the rest of us in times of need,” or “available to working families that can’t afford other health insurance.”
- We tested for the effects of these frames with specific reference to the five-year waiting period for children under the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), and found no significant effect. Regardless of whether respondents were asked to think about potential beneficiaries as “people like us” or as members of “working families,” the consistent finding was that a *majority of respondents favored eliminating the waiting period*.
- As can be expected, support for eliminating the waiting period for immigrant children under SCHIP was higher among Republicans in the electorate than among Democrats and Independents. There were no significant differences by gender or region of residence in the United States.